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FARM RECORD BOOKS IN WEST VIRGINIA

A radio talk by Russell G. Ellyson, Assistant Extension Economist, Morgantown, West Virginia, delivered in the Land-Grant College radio program, December 19, 1934, and broadcast by a network of 48 associate NBC radio stations.

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The keeping of farm records during 1934 was a new venture for the great majority of the 5,200 West Virginia farmers who signed Agricultural Adjustment contracts. Few farmers in the state had kept farm records of any sort previous to the distribution of the Farm Record Book designed by the Agricultural Economics Extension Office to assist the farmer in proving compliance with his contract.

In a state where farmers were not accustomed to working with farm records and where county agents were laboring with a heavy program, made doubly heavy by various emergency activities, it became a major problem to carry a farm record program into the 47 counties of the state in which contract signers lived. Your speaker, who was then county agent in Braxton county, was called into Extension Headquarters at Morgantown and assigned full time to this program. Unfortunately, other urgent tasks were gradually turned over to him until finally the farm record book program became one of his minor duties. He was left free from other duties, however, until the first steps in the record program had been completed.

Each county agent furnished a mailing list of the contracting farmers in his county. A letter explaining the importance of a well-kept record book in proving compliance was mailed to each contract signer. Original plans called for this letter to accompany a book to the farmer as well as a date set for a group meeting. When the record books did not arrive from Washington by April first, as expected, a telegraphic request brought 200 copies to be used in conducting community meetings. With the help of various county agents, record book meetings were scheduled for several communities of each of the more important agricultural counties of the state. At these meetings of contract signers, copies of the books were distributed and a detailed explanation and discussion of the method of recording data was presented. The Extension Specialist in charge of this program conducted 91 of these meetings which were attended by 1,729 contracting producers, an average of 19 producers per meeting. County agents later conducted many meetings other than those attended by the Extension Specialist, with comparable attendance and interest reported. During this campaign three meetings a day--morning, afternoon, and evening-- were held. School houses, churches, community buildings, country stores, and shade trees were utilized as meeting places. The shade trees perhaps were the most popular of the meeting places, particularly on very warm days. It was not unusual to have 30 or 40 farmers under a shade tree discussing record books and farm problems. The largest number to attend any meeting was 125. There was nothing unusual about this number of farmers assembling for a meeting, but the unusual feature was to find them so deeply interested in discussing farm records. From the interest manifested one could not help but feel as though some good would come out of such a program. Unfortunately, the books had to be collected after each meeting for use in another place due to the fact that the full supply of books were not received until after most of the meetings had been held.

When the record books were sent to the contract signers a letter was enclosed giving instructions fixing the beginning date for inventories, the beginning and ending date for the hog count year, and detailed instructions for

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recording data on those pages of the book which we anticipated might give the most trouble.

A second letter was sent to the contract signers early in July. This letter pointed out the types of data that should have been recorded on each page of the book up to July first. A third letter was mailed just before the checking on compliance for corn-hog and tobacco contracts began. This letter, signed by the county agent, stated that the supervisor would soon call to inspect the record books, and explained that finding a well-kept record book would save the time of the supervisor and thus save money for the contract signers.

A few days ago another letter was sent to the contract signers requesting them to complete their books for the year and stating that the books would soon be collected and checked.

Our present plans call for all books to be assembled by the county agents and sent to the state office. There an analysis of the data will be made and useful information made available to the contract signers. It is hoped that the old books may be returned to their owners along with a new book for the coming year. It is too early in the program yet to know how many have kept the records or how well they have been kept.

County agents seeing the need of such a record-book program have worked overtime in assisting interested farmers with their record keeping. The agents feel that this is the beginning of a program which has needed more attention for a long time.

In conclusion, may I say, that although we have not been able to give this program the time that it merits, we do feel that it may become one of the lasting worthwhile phases of the Agricultural Adjustment program which will reach thousands of farmers in an educational way within a short time and one which would otherwise have taken years to accomplish through the regular Agricultural Extension program,